

Jerry T. Verkler

Staff Director

Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, 1963-1974

Preface

by Donald A. Ritchie

The Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 created the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs out of what had been the Committees on Public Lands, Indian Affairs, and Territories, Mines, and Irrigation and Reclamation. The new Interior committee gained jurisdiction over legislation dealing with America's vast public lands and territories, national parks, battlefields, forest reserves, irrigation and reclamation, water supply, interstate compacts, and mineral resources. During the 1950s and '60s the committee concentrated on the planning and management of public lands and resources in the West. Increasingly during the 1960s and '70s the committee handled national environmental and energy issues, so much so that in 1977 it was renamed the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

[James Murray](#) (D-Montana) chaired the Interior Committee from 1955 to 1961, but his failing health passed real leadership onto Senators [Clinton Anderson](#) (D-New Mexico) and [Henry M. Jackson](#) (D-Washington). Anderson formally chaired the committee from 1961 to 1963, and Jackson from 1963 to 1981. Spanning the service of both chairmen, Jerry T. Verkler joined the committee's staff in 1961 under Anderson and became staff director two years later under Jackson.

Born in Black Rock, Arkansas in 1932, Jerry Verkler moved with his family in 1938 to Detroit, Michigan, and in 1948 to Albuquerque, New Mexico. He graduated from the University of New Mexico in 1954, served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1954 to 1956, and received his law degree from George Washington University in 1960. Verkler joined Senator Anderson's staff in 1956 as a legislative assistant, specializing in tax legislation. In 1961 Anderson appointed him assistant chief clerk of the Interior Committee. When Anderson left to chair of the Aeronautics and Space Committee, Henry Jackson asked Verkler to remain with the Interior Committee as staff director. He held that position until 1974, when he became a lobbyist for the Interstate Natural Gas Association.

When Jerry Verkler retired from the Senate staff, Senator Jackson offered this tribute:

Jerry's service as staff director has spanned a period of enormous growth and change for the Interior Committee. During those years, the committee has moved from preoccupation with western resources issues to a role of national leadership on critical energy and environmental problems.

Jerry's leadership was instrumental in the committee's adjustment to its new role. His knowledge of the Senate and its procedures, his ability to work effectively with members of the committee and its staff has made it possible for the committee to fulfill its growing responsibilities.

As an ardent conservationist, Jerry had the opportunity during his years with the committee to help enact landmark legislation in the conservation field. He played an important role in securing the enactment of the Wilderness Act of 1964, which created the National Wilderness System, and the act establishing the Land and Water Conservation Fund. . . .

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There is no doubt that the role played by senior staff members is increasingly significant as the Senate considers a growing number of complex issues. The dedication and hard work of people like Jerry Verkler goes unheralded but the Senate could not function without it. [Congressional Record, 94th Congress, 1st session, April 8, 1975.]

About the Interviewer: Donald A. Ritchie is associate historian of the Senate Historical Office. A graduate of C.C.N.Y., he received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland. His publications include "Oral History in the Federal Government," which appeared in the *Journal of American History*; *James M. Landis: Dean of the Regulators* (Harvard Press, 1980); *The U.S. Constitution* (Chelsea House, 1989); *History of a Free Nation* (Glencoe, 1991); and *Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Harvard, 1991). He also edits the *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* (Historical Series) (Government Printing Office). A former president of both the Oral History Association and Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR), he received OHMAR's Forrest C. Pogue Award for distinguished contributions to the field of oral history.